

WASHINGTON -- A bipartisan group of lawmakers in the House is introducing today a resolution that overturns President Clinton's decision to "certify" the Mexican government as "fully cooperating" with the United States in the war against drugs.

U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL), the lead sponsor of the bipartisan resolution, said President Clinton's decision to certify Mexico is not grounded in the facts. "To say the Mexican government is fully cooperating defies reality. By certifying Mexico, President Clinton has chosen to turn a blind eye to the Mexican government's dismal record. To do so is to dismiss the grave threat this drug trade poses to citizens in both the United States and Mexico. It ignores the will of law-abiding citizens in both countries who want our nations to cooperate fully to stamp out this criminal menace," Bachus said.

By law, the president must judge the performance of all foreign drug-producing countries by March 1 of each year. Congress can overturn the president's decision by majority vote within 30 days. Countries not certified as "fully cooperating" in anti-narcotics efforts lose 50% of U.S. financial aid and U.S. support for assistance from international lending organizations.

The bipartisan resolution, introduced today at a news conference in the Capitol, includes language that would allow the president to waive the sanctions on Mexico if he found it in America's national interests to do so.

"We believe we do need to work with Mexico and other countries. We need to encourage and build up Mexico's efforts. That's why we are including the national security wavier. But we also need to hold the Mexican administration and our own administration accountable for a lack of results," Bachus said. "We want an honest assessment of the Mexican government's record and to send the message that cooperation must improve rapidly. The people of both countries deserve no less than a full commitment and total cooperation between their governments. Efforts to minimize or coverup this lack of cooperation should not be tolerated by citizens of either country."

The Mexican government has had minimal progress over the past year in the fight against narcotics. The Chicago Tribune has reported that some within the Clinton administration "privately admit that Mexico's record was woefully inadequate."

In testimony before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control last week, Drug Enforcement Administration director Thomas Constantine said over the past five years "the power of the [Mexican] criminal organizations has grown virtually geometrically." He called drug corruption in Mexico "unparalleled to anything I've seen in 39 years of law enforcement."

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has reported that Mexico's counterdrug efforts have shown no overall improvement since 1997. "Drugs are still flowing across the border at the same rate as 1997," the GAO's Benjamin Nelson stated in testimony before the Senate caucus.

U.S. law enforcement officials estimate that 65-70% of the cocaine entering the United States passes through Mexico and about 14 percent of the heroin used in the U.S. is made in Mexico. Seizures of cocaine, marijuana and heroin in Mexico declined in 1998, as did the number of drug arrests and investigations. No major drug lords were arrested in the last year.

Bachus also criticized the Mexican government for failing to extradite suspected drug traffickers to stand trial in the United States, especially suspects caught in a U.S. Customs money laundering investigation last year codenamed "Operation Casablanca." The House passed a resolution introduced by Bachus last year commending U.S. agents for their work in "Operation Casablanca."

"The drug lords operating in Mexico fear only one thing: extradition to the United States, where they will face punishment for their crimes. That doesn't happen nearly enough in Mexico," Bachus said, noting that earlier this month drug charges against the Amezcua brothers of Guadalajara - the alleged methamphetamine kingpins -- were dismissed.

Supporters of the resolution to date include Reps. Clay Shaw (R-FL), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Steve Chabot (R-OH), Sue Myrick (R-NC), James Traficant (D-OH), Phil English (R-PA), Dan Burton (R-IN), Bobby Rush (D-IL), Anne Northup (R-KY), Bob Barr (R-GA), John Hostettler (R-IN) and Ernest Istook (R-OK).